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U.S. Citizen Rescued from Kidnapers in Colombia

Gregory Striver, a U.S. citizen who was kidnaped on 15 March, was rescued on 29 April by Colombian army troops in the northeastern city of Santa Marta, Colombia. Striver was described by the authorities as being a 29-year-old jeweler from Albuquerque, New Mexico. Army spokesmen said that they discovered the kidnaping after one of the kidnapers was in an auto accident on 28 April and could not produce proper identification papers. After questioning, he disclosed his link to the band and the location of the hideout.

During interviews, Striver said that he arrived in Colombia during early March and then went to Cartagena, where he met a Spanish woman who suggested they visit Santa Marta. With the connivance of the woman and a taxi driver, the kidnapers took Striver from a taxi on 15 March in Santa Marta to a farmhouse where they chained him arm-to-leg to a bed for the next 45 days while trying to arrange a ransom for his release. Striver said that at first he was slapped around and threatened with death. He was in good condition when rescued. First ransom demands were for approximately U.S. $250,000 but they were later reduced to U.S. $50,000. The ransom was initially to have been paid in Mexico City but was later changed to Bogota, Colombia.

According to Colombian press accounts, five foreigners and two Colombians were arrested for the kidnaping. The true identities of the culprits have not been established because they were carrying false identity papers; however, Colombian officials believe that some of them may be members of the People's Revolutionary Army (ERP) Argentine terrorist group who had come to Colombia to conduct a joint fund-raising operation with members of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) terrorist group. This has not yet been confirmed, however. The apparent involvement of the FARC and the Argentine ERP in such a chance kidnaping in Colombia seems questionable. Authorities have withheld from the press the possible connections of the culprits to the FARC in order to conduct further investigations and exploit leads in the case.

The Colombian military is holding the kidnapers in

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Bogota and will try them in a military court unless the case is transferred to civil jurisdiction. Authorities are still searching for more suspects in the case.

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